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Of Western lands and eke Italian states. But who
 Would then believe that Teucer's sons would reach the shores
 Of Troy? Whom could Cassandra by prophecy move?
 Apollo let's obey and warning take from him;
 For better omens search." He thus did speak, and all,
 With joy, his bidding straightway do. Deserting this
 Abiding place, though yet a few are left behind,
 We set the sails and navigate the ocean vast.

CLOYD LAPORTE

ELASTICITY IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH COURSES

The more one meditates upon present college problems, the clearer it seems to become that one great source of our troubles is our wholesale method of dealing with divergent types of students. On its purely qualitative side this situation appears to have been relieved, in part at least, by the elective principle, sanely and moderately applied; but the quantitative difficulty remains. By this is meant the delusion that we ought to impose upon all undergraduates identical terms of residence and schedule, regardless of gifts—that, once the dead line of "admission" is passed, all students should take precisely the same number of subjects per week, and remain the same number of years, in spite of differences in intelligence, industry, and previous training. This topic, in its wider bearings, is dealt with by the present writer in an article prepared for the *Educational Review*; our purpose here is to speak of its particular relation to the problem of Freshman English courses, the reason for this brief comment upon the English situation (by a rank outsider) being the extended discussion which this problem has received of late in the correspondence columns of the *New York Nation*.

In the issue of February 29, Mr. Henry Adams Bellows says:

But let us consider the problem which the teacher of college English has to face. His Freshman students for the most part cannot spell. Their notions of grammar are often either non-existent or hideously warped. Their vocabularies are infinitesimal, and which is worse, their use of the few words that they dare employ without blushing is so loose as to defy definition. . . . All this the college teacher must fight against, and yet, out of respect for academic traditions, and also in consideration of the saving remnant to whom the English language has not become a snare and a delusion, he must make his work "advanced." He cannot line up his class and institute a spelling-bee; he cannot take as a textbook a primer of grammar. In other words he must try to reconcile two irreconcilable elements. . . . No reformation of college work

in writing can hope to alter materially these conditions. The change must come first of all in the schools; for though a college student may be in dire need of a primer, he is beyond the stage when he is likely to profit by it.

Obviously our schools ought to do far better, but it still remains a question whether they *will* do much better in the near future, and whether our colleges are not going to continue for some time to admit a large proportion of relatively illiterate students. Facing this condition, and leaving theories behind, the next question to emerge concerns the possibility of doing anything for these illiterates in college. If teachers of English have already demonstrated that college instruction has no definite effect upon this material, then all that is being said here is beside the mark, and the only way to reform Freshman English is to abolish it. But we shall assume, for the sake of argument, that a residuum of teachableness can still be found in the Freshman; if this be true, one need not hesitate to suggest that the present trouble is with our wholesale courses. In no other subject is elastic individual treatment more important, but the prevalent method is a rigid wholesale one, with the same amount of the same kind of work for all hands, the illiterate and the "saving remnant" alike. What is meant here by the desired "individual treatment" is not our present "theme conference," but the extension and enrichment of the whole course, and the addition of extra hours in which deficient students may be brought up to par in every division of the subject. If this policy were pursued we should hear no more of courses of the old type: "English 1: daily themes; recitations and discussions; 3 hours per week; required of all Freshmen." Instead, we should read in the catalogue something like this: "English 1: required of all students in proportion to their needs, throughout the Freshman year, and into the second year if necessary. The different sections of the class will meet from 2 to 6 times per week, and as many weekly themes will be required as each individual case may justify."

The exact details of such a course should be left to the experts, but we may suggest an outline that may make the case clearer. Subdividing a typical Freshman class of, say, 100 men into various grades (using high-school records, entrance examinations, or a special examination), we might discover three or more categories; for instance, the *élite* (the upper 25), the average (the middle 50), and the awkward squad. For the men of high rank there would be the minimum of class meetings and theme work. The great mediocre body of students would supply material for at least two sections, which would meet 4 or 5 times a week (partly for extra drill on weak points) and write about twice as many themes

as section one. The tail-enders ought to be assembled for instruction 5 or 6 times weekly and to write about thrice as many themes as the good men. Added class meetings would afford the desired opportunity for subsidiary training of the most elementary kind. The instructor would have no fear to take "as a textbook a primer of grammar"; that is what the extra meetings would be for. Nor need he hesitate to "institute a spelling-bee"—or perhaps a series of lessons in dictation, of which spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure would be the main objects.

Finally, an arrangement of this kind seems likely to produce two other morally beneficial results, which lie outside of the English department. It would put a premium upon excellence, by attaching an obvious and public reward to high standing and a corresponding penalty to illiteracy. Secondly, it would teach the wholesome lesson that work in this world to which we bring inferior ability or equipment is going to demand an increased expenditure of effort if it is to be honestly done.

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PHILIP H. CHURCHMAN

To the Editor of the "English Journal":

Your letter tempts me: I think I shall fall. When first I read your invitation to write on the subject of the review of my book¹ of selected poems for use in schools, I hesitated, in the opinion that the issues there raised were not of sufficiently general interest to warrant discussion. But when I reflected that your invitation was general enough to justify a reply of some scope, my hesitation turned to wavering. Then came the reflection that the only way of showing proper respect to temptation is to give in to it; and that decided me.

As far as the review itself is concerned, I fear I cannot get up a respectable controversy; I am too prone to agree with it. In fact, I feel that I anticipated its strictures in the Introduction to the volume in question. The choice of the poems there collected seems to me by no means ideal, and I would gladly have selected differently; but I prepared the book when the College-Entrance Examination Board had just announced its new lists, and had included in them a variety of short poems, notably those from the fourth book of Palgrave. Guided by this list, I chose what seemed best for my purpose, and restricted by

¹ See the review of *Narrative and Lyric Poems for Students* in the *English Journal* for February, 1912.